



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Rita M. Schmidt, Councilors Genevieve Cerf, Joe de la Cruz, Bruce S. Flax, Bob Frink, Rich Moravsik, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Heather Bond Somers and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, March 18, 2014

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Somers

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

Board of Education: Rita Volkmann, Kirsten Hoyt, Andrea Ackerman, Beth Gianacoplos, Kim Shepardson-Watson, Superintendent of Schools Mike Graner, Director of Building and Grounds Bill Robarge

3. NEW BUSINESS

2014-0009 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

- *FYE 2015 Budget*

Councilor Flax asked if the issues he spoke to Dr. Graner about earlier could be addressed when the Council meets with the Board on the budget and Dr. Graner said yes.

Councilor Cerf asked why costs are going up if enrollments are declining. Dr. Graner noted that the Board of Education pays for 337 students that do not sit in Groton Public Schools' classrooms. Students from Groton are chosen by lottery to attend LEARN magnet schools, which means the number of Groton students can change from year to year. Some Groton students are also attending New London choice schools. Ms. Hoyt added that the Board also doesn't know the number/cost of special education students/services moving in and out of the district. There are approximately 550 special education students (12%), as well as an 18-21 year old special education population out in the community.

Councilor Peruzzotti questioned state reimbursement for special needs students. Dr. Graner explained that if Groton has no program to meet the needs of the child, it must pay 4½ times the per pupil expenditure before a partial reimbursement grant can be applied for from the state. If the state makes a child go to a program, Groton pays the per pupil expenditure rate only. He noted that medically fragile children are very expensive to educate. Groton's average per pupil expenditure is approximately \$13,000. Groton also pays for special education services for children attending school outside of Groton. Discussion followed on special education services, services for children who do not speak English, and state reimbursement issues.

- *New Mandates (including Unfunded Mandates)*

Mayor Schmidt asked if the Board could provide a list of state mandates and the costs to the

district. Councilor Peruzzotti noted this issue was discussed with local legislators and she would like to have a bullet list for the budget discussion.

Councilor Cerf questioned the empty busses leaving Fitch in the afternoon. Dr. Graner noted that bus ridership varies by season due to sports. Also, the buses also service the elementary and middle schools and are making triple runs every day.

- Status of Vision Statement and Education Specifications

Dr. Graner explained that the Board has decided to pull together a stakeholder meeting, hire a facilitator, and have a discussion about where Pre-K through grade 8 education should go for the next 20 years. The next step would be development of education specifications. The information would then be turned over to the Town Council.

In response to Councilor Frink, Dr. Graner explained that the vision statement is a vision of the schools not a curriculum plan. Dr. Graner suggested that the educational specifications can be completed quickly because the information is already available and will the Board will follow state reimbursement guidelines.

Discussion followed on the school initiative process. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the Board of Education develop a schedule for its activities at its first meeting so that the School Facilities Initiative Task Force can be notified of the potential timetable. With respect to having a committee develop a vision statement, the Town Manager suggested that the Board would be better off to not involve others (including the School Facilities Initiative Task Force) who may have preconceived notions.

Councilor de la Cruz discussed finding a model school that would work in any community so that the community would have an idea of what the facility would look like when they are voting at the referendum.

- Fitch Middle School - Update

Dr. Graner noted that he is aware of a lot of people who have alternate uses for the building. The Board continues to heat the building and support the Parks and Recreation program there. Currently, the building contains thousands of student and financial records, special education equipment, etc. Dr. Graner hopes to have everything out of the building by July 1st. The Board may auction off some of the supplies stored in the building. Discussion followed on imaging of records.

- School Security

Ms. Hoyt noted that Board's desire to use state reimbursement funds from security projects on additional security projects. Mr. Robarge reviewed completed Phase I projects and upcoming Phase II projects and noted that security drills are routinely conducted.

Councilor Flax noted that school security is impossible for after school activities. He questioned when the point comes that there is enough security so that money isn't being spent just to feel better. Dr. Graner relayed two lessons from the Newtown experience relayed by that town's Superintendent of Schools - slow the perpetrator down and get first responders there as fast as possible. Discussion followed on security issues.

- Shared Services

- Playing Fields

The Board and Council felt that these two issues could be discussed by the Liaison Committee.

- *Establishing a Regular Meeting Schedule*

Establishment of a regular meeting schedule for the two groups was left to Mayor Schmidt and Chairperson Volkmann.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.